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NEDERLANDSE VERENIGING VOOR RUIMTEVAART

2018|1

RUIMTEVAART



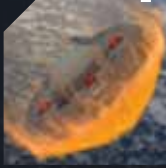
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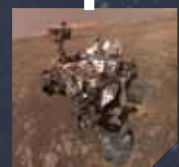
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The first European Overview Symposium

Philippe Ailleris

In the almost sixty years since humans ventured into orbit for the first time, space activities have continuously been expanding our understanding of the universe and our knowledge of the Earth environment. Apollo photographs like “Earthrise” and “Blue marble” have had a remarkable impact on humanity’s planetary self-awareness. Moreover astronauts have often undergone a profound alteration of their perceptions and attitudes while viewing Earth from orbit or the moon. Many have even reported “truly transformative experiences involving senses of wonder and awe, unity with nature, transcendence and universal brotherhood”.

This “Overview Effect”, a term coined by American space philosopher Frank White and described in his book of the same name, has changed their perspective on the world forever. As a result of this cognitive shift, they feel the vulnerability of our planet to such an extent that many of them dedicate their lives towards improving life on Earth.

Down to Earth

Being able to transfer the Overview Effect and its transformative power is a potential game changer in human behaviour towards a sustainable future. But is it possible to experience this astronaut’s view of the Earth without actually going to space? How to bring the Overview Effect down to Earth using technologies, stories, videos, images? How can the Overview Effect and its transformative power be of use to organisations in realising their sustainability and social responsibility goals? These questions and related themes were the

main focus of the first European Overview Symposium held on November 3, 2017 at the Columbus Earth centre in Kerkrade (Limburg). On this occasion a group of researchers, psychologists, philosophers and scientists came together to share their insights with an audience.

The choice of the venue was the excellent Columbus Earth centre, a recent and modern institution that is part of the so-called “Museumplein Limburg”. It is composed of no less than three connected institutions: the beautiful modern theatre that is the Columbus Earth centre itself, the Cube museum centre and the Continium discovery center. The symposium was very well organised, all logistics ran smoothly and approximately 90 people were in attendance. The atmosphere was at once professional and relaxed, and the diversity of the speaker’s background contributed to a rich day and a great exchange of ideas with the public. The moderator of the symposium was writer and philosopher **Govert Derix**, who did an outstanding job

of presenting speakers, summarising talks and asking probing questions.

Joos Ockels, the wife of the late, first Dutch astronaut Wubbo Ockels, opened the symposium by stressing how emotional it had been for her husband to view for the first time our planet from space. She stressed that it is imperative to take better care of it if we want the next generations also be able to enjoy its amazing beauty. Next up were **Hans Gubbels** (CEO Museumplein Limburg) and **Felix Hoch** (Program Manager and one of the symposium organisers), who introduced the symposium programme and articulated clearly the objectives of the day and what the audience was going to experience.

After watching a documentary about the Overview Effect, the keynote lecture was delivered by **Frank White**. Thirty years after the publication of his book, he emphasised the fact that the message was now really getting out and there was finally a real worldwide audience for the Overview Effect. White emphasised that experien-



Participants to the Symposium. [Kenneth Tan]



Speaker Frank White. [author]

cing it should be a human right and there was the need of starting a “movement for change”. As multiple crises are facing our planet (such as war, climate change, poverty, pollution) we need global solutions, requiring “overview thinking”.

After this inspiring talk, the symposium participants were able to experience a unique and unforgettable “out of the world” experience at the **Columbus Earth center**. This is in fact the first establishment in the world to attempt to mimic the Overview Effect on ground. In the darkness of an impressive building space and while a meditative music gradually fills the room, the participants – standing up at the edge of a transparent glass balustrade – are exposed to the beauty of Earth through an immersive ‘Earth Experience’ installation. Watching at a large round film screen (approximately 20 meters wide) placed some 10-15 meters below the public, the astronaut’s perspectives of viewing the Earth from above is neatly re-created. The show took the attendees on a spectacular

trip, and I began to understand what astronauts feel while gazing at various locations on Earth, discovering beautiful natural phenomena like the magic Northern Lights or various thunderstorms above the oceans, and by sensing the fragility of Earth atmosphere and admiring the deep colours of the oceans. As the show ended, I was grasping the notion that the Earth is somehow a single global living organism floating in the emptiness of space.

Planetary Awareness

After White’s presentation and a tasty lunch at the museum facilities, it was my turn to speak. As Project Controller at ESA/ESTEC for Earth Observation Satellites, my thesis was that the continuously increasing amount of satellites images, the arrival of high-resolution open data and guaranteed data continuity through the EU/ESA Copernicus programme provide great opportunities for democratising the Overview Effect. According to me the quick-cadence satellite imagery,

coupled with the advent of personal technology such as smart phones, holds huge potential for the creation of innovative products and services aiming at fostering a sense of stewardship for our planet.

Richard Whitehurst, director and co-founder of The Overview Institute of Australia, was next up and spoke about practical approaches to enhance ‘planetary awareness’ through a variety of contemplative considerations. He also led a brief meditation that assisted the attendees in viscerally anchoring feelings of such awareness in their bodies via the use of a carefully formatted hypothetical question: “If this powerful planetary overview awareness was fully absorbed throughout your body, mind and heart ... how would that feel?” The audience participated willingly to this stimulating exercise.

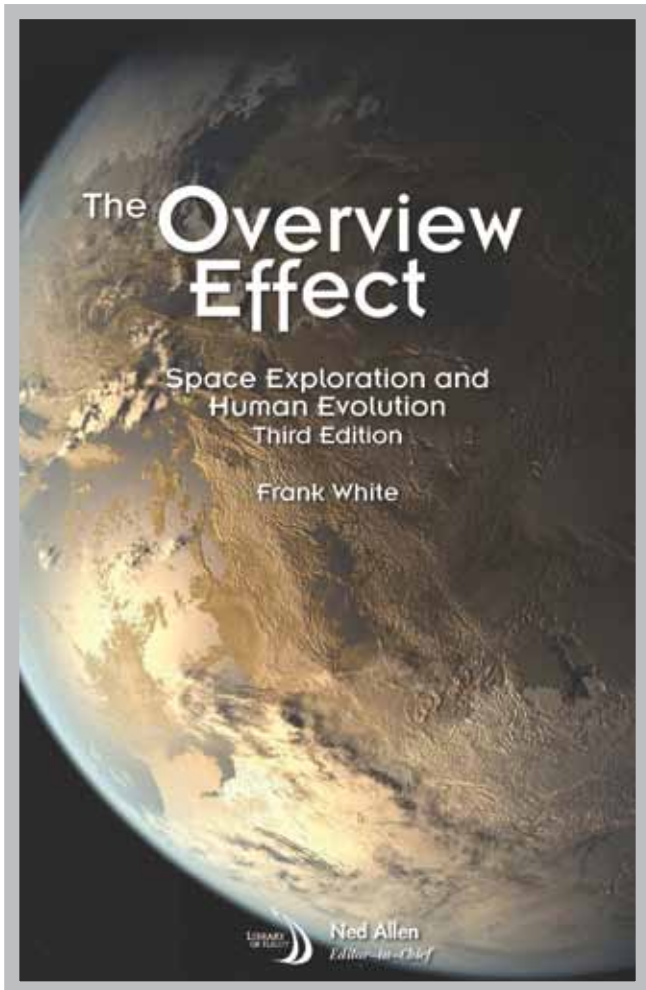
Next was a WebEx video link with British psychologist therapist **Annahita Nezami**. She argued about the relevance of the Overview Effect for Psychology, by presenting the results of a study that in-



Inside the Columbus Earth Center, Kerkrade. [Columbus Earth Center]



Speaker Erik Schoppen. [author]



Cover of the latest edition of Frank White's book.



Frank White signing the European Overview Forum Declaration. [Kenneth Tan]



Light art project 'Earth Rise' by Caspar Noyons. [author]

interviewed seven retired NASA astronauts about their experiences of Earth gazing from orbit and viewing nature from this perspective. According to her, it appears that Earth gazing can strengthen our connection to nature and life, elicit awe and wonder, reduce cognitive and emotional stress, and enable creativity, social cohesion and pro-social behaviour. These central features suggest therefore that it can instigate behavioural change and foster wellbeing, and therefore make it relevant to psychology.

A completely different perspective was brought by **Erik Schoppen** (a behavioural/social neuroscientist and expert in brand, trust and leadership), who showed that when we embrace new technologies like neuro-facing (human-computer interfacing) and future-oriented sustainable thinking, it motivates people and businesses to change their behaviour and develop a more positive look towards the future. To research this and to develop a deeper understanding about our planet, Schoppen has initiated "WorldBrainWave.com

– Social Neuroscience for a Sustainable Future", an online research platform providing online (cross-platform) tools for neuroscientific, psychological, sociological, organisational and economical research.

Sustainability

The issue of how the Overview Effect could positively influence the way in which organisations deal with sustainability was addressed by Felix Hoch and Lars Morati during the last part of the symposium. Taking the case of purpose-driven organisations and because businesses have by far the greatest impact on how we organise our societies today, **Felix Hoch** argued that we should transform our societies through transforming our business by bringing in planetary purpose. According to him this can be done by focusing on an Overview process, a process of systematically facilitating experiences of the planetary perspective, and of integrating and applying them to our organisational and societal challenges. Such process would

ideally cover four angles: the Overview Effect (on individuals, culture and society); the Facilitation (thanks to communication technologies like social media, immersive media and space, Virtual Reality); the Integration (through consciousness technologies like mindfulness practices or nature experience) and finally the Application (via social technologies like design thinking). It was clear for Hoch that organisations have a strong role to play and should contribute to the call for an increase demand of sustainability.

Lars Morati, Professor of Sustainable Business, focused his talk on the perspective of Corporate Sustainability, and emphasised that an important role for the Overview Effect was to create a new generation of "entrepreneurs", as organisations have until now experienced significant difficulties to embrace into their business models sustainability aspects. Morati even wondered whether humankind ultimately has some "built-in barriers", preventing us from behaving in a sustainability way.

Actions

At the end of the symposium, following a structured process of brainstorming and information exchange, the organisers stressed the necessity for follow-up actions, aiming at making a difference for the benefit of the planet and humankind. As a concrete conclusion of the symposium the attendees were invited to sign a declaration marking the foundation of the **European Overview Forum**, transforming them at the same time into the first European Overview Forum Ambassadors. This forum, endorsed by the Overview Institute in the United States, has the intention to facilitate an academic and experimental laboratory for research and development initiatives that specifically focus on stimulating and applying the Overview Effect. Concerning future plans, it was mentioned that the American's Institute was planning to organise a symposium in 2019. Finally the day finished back at the Columbus Earth Center on a great artistic note and in a very relaxed atmosphere between attendees, organisers and speakers. While enjoying some light food and

Overview Effect book and websites

- *The Overview Effect, Space Exploration and Human Evolution* by Frank White, American Institute of Aeronautics & Astronautics, 2014.
- Website Columbus Earth center: <http://www.columbusearththeater.nl/nl>.
- Website of the Overview Institute: <http://www.overviewinstitute.org>
- Website of the Overview Institute of Australia: <https://www.overviewinstituteaustralia.org>
- Website of the European Overview Forum: <http://overviewforum.com>
- Website of Daniele de Paulis: <http://www.danieladepaulis.com>
- YouTube movie on the Earth Rise travelling installation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDCUEZT2BcE>

drinks, the audience could experience the creations of two Netherlands-based interdisciplinary artists: **Daniela de Paulis** provided for a compelling visual and auditory experience of "COGITO in Space" (see also Ruimtevaart 2015-4), and **Caspar Noyons** demonstrated his "Earth Rise travelling installation". Certainly a great way to finish this inspiring symposium and to demonstrate that the Overview Effect could be experienced by people like me, stranded on Earth. It had been a fruitful symposium. By

the end of the day I felt confident that the "movement for change" advocated by White could indeed take shape. I am thankful to the organisers for the inspiration that this symposium had given me, including the possibility to build up new personal connections. Moreover I certainly recommend to the readers and their families to come visit the Museumplein Limburg, and experience the unique and enormous audio-visual Earth gazing installation at its Columbus Earth Center.

advertentie

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www.sizzlingsummerofspace.nl